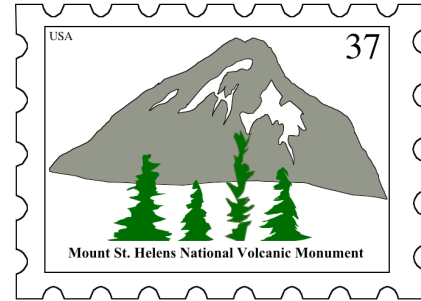


HELLO THERE!

I'm Brendan, and I live in Vancouver, Washington, just 80 km southwest of the site you want to learn about in the Pacific Northwest – Mount St. Helens! It's one of the most famous volcanoes in North America due to the huge blast that took place in 1980. I hope I can help you as you learn more about the area. I go to the mountain at least once a month to monitor the volcano



Mount Saint Helens is located in southern Washington in the Cascade Mountains.

with instruments and collect samples. Maybe one day you can visit and come with me on one of these trips!

Mount St. Helens and my hometown of Vancouver are both in southern Washington. Vancouver is right on the Washington-Oregon border – the next closest big city is Portland, Oregon. My parents used to live in Vancouver but now work as researchers in a lab in Portland, while I still live here with my older brother Jeremy. He's not into volcanoes like I am, but he comes with me on my trips every now and then.

Do you like hiking? I love it, and I do it a lot when I go see the mountain. This area is a really popular site for hikers and photographers. People come here to take pictures because we're right in the middle of the Cascade Mountain Range. These beautiful mountains have snow-covered peaks and stretch all the way from northern California through Oregon, Washington, and all the way to southern British Columbia, Canada – a total distance of over 700 mi (1,120 km). Mount St. Helens is just one of several volcanoes located in the Cascades. Local Native Americans originally called Mount St. Helens "loo-wit," which translates into "smoking mountain."

I'm sure you want me to cut to the chase and talk about the big blast! I wasn't around when it happened, but the eruption of Mount St. Helens is a huge part of our culture around here. Those that were around when it happened have lots of stories to tell. One of those people is Ranger Gary Adams. He's been a park ranger in the local area for 25 years and was just starting out his career when the volcano erupted on the morning of May 18, 1980 – 8:32 AM, to be exact. A 5.1 magnitude earthquake triggered a landslide. A bulge of magma in the side of Mount St. Helens had been building up pressure and then was released in a large blast. This released a huge downpour of rocks, which was followed by an eruption of pumice and ash. It's sort of like if you were to shake a can of soda before opening it; pressure would build up, making it explode when you opened it!

The release of pressure caused by this earthquake and landslide led to a huge blast out of the north side of the volcano. You usually think of volcanoes erupting from the top and hot magma and ash pouring out from the peak of the mountain, but Mount St. Helens' eruption wasn't like that. Instead, rock and debris poured out of the side. These kinds of eruptions are not as

Mt. St. Helens

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common as out-of-the-top blasts, and they are typically more destructive. They cause more damage because the energy produced by the explosion can go straight across land rather than being shot upwards first and then falling to the ground. Have you ever tried to spray your friend with a water hose? This sideways explosion was like shooting a water hose directly at your friend rather than aiming it upwards first and hitting your target on the way down. Today, there is a dome of magma where the volcano's side blew out. The dome is building up, and one day it will fill in the volcano so that it will be as if it never erupted.



Before and after the 1980 eruption

<http://www.olywa.net/radu/valerie/mshafter.html?>

In all, the Mount St. Helens eruption not only killed 57 people but also caused hundreds of millions of dollars in property damage! Over 200 homes were wrecked and nearly 185 miles of paved roads were lost. You might also think that volcanoes erupt just lava, but Mount St. Helens erupted ash, rock, and debris. There was so much ash in the air that in Yakima, a town east of the mountain, day literally turned to night!

The blast was so powerful that it was the same as exploding 10 million tons of dynamite! It blew down trees, which fell like matchsticks in the path of the explosion. Entire forests were wiped out in a matter of minutes, and mudflows wiped out houses as if they were made of paper.

Scientists advised people to leave, and areas close to the mountain were restricted. However, no one knew when the blast was actually going to happen, and some people were stubborn about leaving. Thankfully Ranger Adams listened when the scientists gave the evacuation order. He and his family moved to a safe zone about 65 km away. His entire office and home were swept away by the blast in the first couple of seconds. How scary is that?

Ranger Adams has told me that no one really expected Mount St. Helens to explode the way it did. For one thing, as early as the 1800s, Native Americans in the area had reported ashes, steam, and small amounts of lava pouring out of Mount St. Helens, and they had witnessed many eruptions, none of which were as big as this one. In addition, earthquakes are common around these parts, even of the magnitude that triggered the blast. For example, just last week, there was a small earthquake a little bit north of here that woke me up in the middle of the night!

I hope that some day you can observe Mount St. Helens and experience a part of American history! I'm actually very proud to have such a famous site right next to me – I can go visit the area often, while most people travel hundreds of miles just to get a glimpse of it. If you ever do visit, be sure to bring your raincoat and lots of extra clothes. It rains buckets up here!

Keep in touch!  
Brendan Harrison  
46°N 122°W